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Message Text

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DRAFTED BY EUR/EE:IMSILINS:SAM
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EUR:JAARMITAGE
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 104105

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CSCE, SHUM, RO

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN ROMANIA - NIMETZ/NICOLAE MEETING
MAY 5

REF: BUCHAREST 3132

1. SUMMARY: COUNSELOR NIMETZ TOLD AMBASSADOR NICOLAE THAT CURRENT ROMANIAN CRACKDOWN, IF CONTINUED, WOULD LIKELY BECOME PUBLIC IRRITANT IN US-ROMANIAN RELATIONS. COUNSELOR ALSO SAID CARTER-CEAUSESCU MEETING BE MOST DIFFICULT TO ARRANGE UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT MIGHT BE CONSIDERED AT APPROPRIATE TIME. NICOLAE PRESENTED LENGTHY EXPOSITION OF ROMANIAN VIEWPOINT, IMPLYING THAT US IS SEEN AS UNDERMINING ROMANIAN INTERNAL DISCIPLINE. END SUMMARY.

2. COUNSELOR NIMETZ CALLED IN AMBASSADOR NICOLAE ALONE MAY 5 TO EXPRESS ADMINISTRATION CONCERN AT RECENT ROMANIAN CONFIDENTIAL

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CRACKDOWN ON DISSIDENTS AND ANTI-US PRESS CAMPAIGN. DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY ARMITAGE AND DESK OFFICER SILINS ALSO PARTICIPATED. MEETING LASTED JUST OVER ONE HOUR.

3. COUNSELOR SAID WE ARE TROUBLED AND DISTRESSED BY EVENTS OF RECENT MONTHS IN ROMANIA, PARTICULARLY BY WHAT

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APPEARS TO BE PURPOSEFUL ANTI-US PRESS CAMPAIGN AND ARREST
AND IMPRISONMENT OF PERSONS SUCH AS GOMA, GEORGESCU AND
TON WHO APPEAR TO BE DOING NOTHING MORE THAN SPEAKING IN
SUPPORT OF HELSINKI PRINCIPLES. COUNSELOR NOTED THAT
BOTH HE AND ARMITAGE HAD TESTIFIED BEFORE HOUSE INTERNA-
TIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF EARTHQUAKE AID
AND, IN RESPONSE TO SEVERAL QUESTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN
ROMANIA,HAD PAINTED GENERALLY FAVORABLE PICTURE AND SAID
WE KNOW OF NO IMPRISONMENTS. SO FAR THE PRESENT SITUATION
HAS NOT BECOME A MAJOR PUBLIC ISSUE, AND WE HAVE NOT
MADE ANY PUBLIC STATEMENTS. PRESIDENT CARTER AND SECRE-
TARY VANCE HAVE MADE CLEAR THE US IS NOT INTERESTED IN
INTERFERING WITH OR OVERTURNING OTHER GOVERNMENTS, BUT HAVE
MADE IT EQUALLY CLEAR US MUST SPEAK OUT WHEN CLEAR VIO-
LATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ARE INVOLVED. WE WOULD NOT WANT
TO HAVE PUBLIC ISSUE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN ROMANIA UNLESS
ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, BUT WITH MFN RENEWAL PROCESS, EARTH-
QUAKE AID APPROPRIATION, AND BELGRADE CONFERENCE COMING
UP, QUESTIONS ARE BOUND TO ARISE, AND IT WILL
BE DIFFICULT TO AVOID COMMENT. WE ARE CONFUSED BY
THESE LATEST ROMANIAN ACTIONS BECAUSE WE DO NOT PERCEIVE
A THREAT TO THE ROMANIAN LEADERSHIP, WHICH APPEARS POPU-
LAR AND STRONG. NOR DO WE BELIEVE THE US HAS CAUSED ANY
AFFRONT TO ROMANIA WHICH WOULD JUSTIFY THE ANTI-US PRESS
CAMPAIGN. WE HOPE THE SITUATION CAN BE CLEARED UP SO AS
TO AVOID A PUBLIC DEBATE; HENCE THIS PRIVATE TALK.

3. ARMITAGE ADDED THAT SOME OF THOSE ARRESTED HAVE
EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO LEAVE ROMANIA; OBVIOUSLY THE REAC-
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TION IN THE US WILL BE DIFFERENT IF PEOPLE ARE ALLOWED
TO LEAVE THAN IF THEY RECEIVED HARSH SENTENCES.

4. NICOLAE REPLIED THAT ROMANIAN INTEREST IN GOOD RELA-
TIONS WITH THE US REMAINS HIGH. PRESIDENT CEAUSESCU HAD
REAFFIRMED THIS TO NICOLAE DURING HIS RECENT CONSULTATIONS
IN BUCHAREST. GOR ALSO APPRECIATES US OFFER OF EARTH-
QUAKE AID. HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN MIND RO-
MANIAN INTERESTS. AS FOREIGN MINISTER MACOVESCU HAD EX-
PLAINED TO AMBASSADOR BARNES, GOR WAS SURPRISED AT "UN-
PLEASANT ATTITUDE" OF US NEWSPAPERMEN, WHICH CAUSED
CERTAIN ARTICLES TO GO BEYOND CRITICISM TO INSULT. EVEN
"SENSITIVE MATTERS" HAD BEEN REPORTED ON, SUCH AS ALLEGED
KILLING OF WOMAN BY CEAUSESCU MOTORCADE. NICOLAE
MAINTAINED THIS REPORT WAS FALSE. CONTINUING HIS LENGTHY
REBUTTAL (PARTLY IN ROMANIAN), NICOLAE TOUCHED ON US
PRESS REPORTS THAT ROMANIAN PEOPLE ARE BEING FORCED TO

WORK WEEKENDS; REFERENCE TO "CONCENTRATION CAMPS" IN RO-

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MANIA (BY WHICH HE PRESUMABLY MEANT SHORT ARTICLE WHICH REFERRED TO "LABOR CAMPS"); RFE BROADCASTING OF GOMA'S TELEPHONE NUMBER; AND US EMPHASIS ON SPECIFIC HUMAN RIGHTS CASES, AS OPPOSED TO GENERAL PRINCIPLES. THRUST OF HIS PRESENTATION WAS THAT IN ORDER TO MEET DEVELOPMENT GOALS, WHICH ARE PRECONDITION FOR ROMANIA'S ABILITY TO DEAL ON EQUAL TERMS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES, INCLUDING "SOCIALIST" ONES, GOR MUST ACT VERY PRUDENTLY IN MO0ILIZING POPULATION. BY IMPLICATION, US IS MAKING INTERNAL DISCIPLINE MORE DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN. FURTHER, ROMANIA CANNOT ACCEPT ANY INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS, WHICH CAN TAKE VARIOUS FORMS AND BE INTERPRETED IN DIFFERENT WAYS BY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES (I.E. USSR). KEEPING IN MIND ROMANIA'S GEOGRAPHIC POSITION, ROMANIAN LEADERSHIP REMAINS CONFIDENT BUT MUST ALSO BE PRUDENT.

4. IN PART OF CONVERSATION HE EMPHASIZED WAS "UNOFFICIAL," CONFIDENTIAL

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NICOLAE SAID HE KNEW SOMETHING ABOUT TON'S STATUS BUT NOT THE OTHERS MENTIONED. TON, HE SAID, HAD DONE SOMETHING "VERY BAD FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ROMANIAN BAPTIST CHURCH AND THE ROMANIAN AUTHORITIES": HE SENT A LETTER TO RFE "EXPLAINING VARIOUS CASES." OTHER ROMANIAN BAPTISTS, NOT THE GOR, HAD REMOVED TON AS PASTOR IN PLOIESTI FOR THIS REASON. HOWEVER, TON IS AT PRESENT NOT RPT NOT UNDER ARREST; HE IS BEING ALLOWED TO CONDUCT RELIGIOUS SERVICES AT "SOME CHURCHES" IN BUCHAREST. NICOLAE ALSO STRESSED THE GENERAL POINT THAT IF SOME PERSONS HAD BEEN ARRESTED IN ROMANIA, WHICH WAS POSSIBLE, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY HAD CLEARLY VIOLATED ROMANIAN LAW BY DOING SOMETHING MORE THAN SIMPLY CRITICIZING GOR, WHICH WAS NOT ILLEGAL. THEREFORE, SUCH ARRESTS WERE AN INTERNAL MATTER, NOT A PROPER SUBJECT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEBATE.

5. COUNSELOR RESPONDED THAT US ALSO RECOGNIZES NEED TO BE PRUDENT IN THESE MATTERS AND SYMPATHIZES TO SOME EXTENT WITH PROBLEM ROMANIA FACES. WE ARE NOT ATTEMPTING TO INTERFERE IN ROMANIA'S DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, NOR ARE WE DISCUSSING THE LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE CASES MENTIONED; RATHER, OUR CONCERN IS WITH THE POSSIBLE PROBLEM IN OUR RELATIONS CAUSED BY ARRESTS OF PERSONS FOR SUPPORTING HELSINKI PRINCIPLES OR FOR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY. US PRESS IS NOT CONTROLLED BY ANYONE; GENERAL EARTHQUAKE COVERAGE WAS HIGHLY SYMPATHETIC. PERHAPS GOR IS TOO SENSITIVE ABOUT PRESS ITEMS. ON OTHER HAND, DELIBERATE SELECTION OF NEGATIVE ITEMS ABOUT US, EVEN IF TAKEN (AS NICOLAE CLAIMED) FROM US PRESS, REFLECTS GOR POLICY AND IS INTERPRETED ACCORDINGLY BY ROMANIAN PEOPLE. NICOLAE SAID THERE IS NO PLACE FOR ANTI-AMERICANISM IN ROMANIAN POLICY, BUT THE "IN-

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CREASING PRESENTATION OF REALITIES IN CAPITALIST COUNTRIES IS BECAUSE OF INCREASING PRESENTATION OF ROMANIAN REALITIES IN WESTERN PRESS."

6. NICOLAE SAID IT WAS IMPORTANT TO LOOK TO THE FU-
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TURE COURSE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN ROMANIA AND US. IN THIS CONNECTION, IT WAS IMPORTANT TO ARRANGE A MEETING IN THE NEAR FUTURE BETWEEN PRESIDENTS CARTER AND CEAUSESCU, SO THEY COULD DISCUSS ISSUES DIRECTLY. CEAUSESCU IS VERY INTERESTED IN MEETING CARTER, PREFERABLY IN ROMANIA, WHERE HE COULD GET SOME FIRST-HAND IMPRESSIONS. COUNSELOR REPLIED THAT FIRST MONTHS OF NEW ADMINISTRATION ARE DIF-FICULT TIME TO ARRANGE SUCH TRAVEL, BUT PERHAPS IT COULD BE DISCUSSED AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME. UNDER PRESENT CIR-CUMSTANCES, IN VIEW OF EVENTS SUCH AS ARREST OF A BAPTIST PASTOR AND PROFESSOR WHO HAD STUDIED IN US, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO PROPOSE SUCH A VISIT. COUNSELOR AND ARMITAGE BOTH POINTED OUT THAT OUR INTENT IN THIS MEETING WAS TO BE SURE THAT PRESIDENT CARTER'S VIEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS WERE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD AND TO UNDERLINE THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR OUR RELATIONS THAT HANDLING OF CASES OF THOSE ARRESTED FOR DEFENSE OF HELSINKI OBLIGA-TIONS BE RESTRAINED. OTHERWISE, PUBLIC CONFRONTATION MIGHT ENSUE. WE ASKED THAT NICOLAE CONVEY THIS MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT CEAUSESCU WITH WHOM US LEADERS HAD EN-JOYED SUCH GOOD RELATIONS. CHRISTOPHER

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